

NORTHEAST FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAM
WHAT TO EXPECT DURING AN OBSERVED TRIP

Observers shall perform the following duties, at a minimum:

Conduct a pre-trip safety inspection;

Communicate with vessel personnel about observer duties and data collection needs;

Ask the captain and/or owner of the vessel for some economic information, such as trip costs (price of fuel, ice, etc.) and fixed costs (amount spent on annual insurance, repairs, etc.);

Collect information on fishing gear, such as size of nets and dredges, mesh sizes, and gear configurations;

Collect tow-by-tow information, such as depth, water temperature, wave height, and location and time when fishing begins and ends;

Record all kept and discarded catch (fish, sharks, crustaceans, invertebrates, and debris) on observed hauls and record kept catch on unobserved hauls, which includes species, weight, and disposition reason;

Collect actual weights of catch whenever possible, otherwise estimate or extrapolate weights;

Collect whole specimens, photos, and biological samples, such as scales, ear bones, and spines; and

Collect detailed information on interactions with protected species, such as sea turtles, porpoise, dolphins, whales, and birds (also called incidental takes).

Observers should not:

Provide advice about fishing regulations;

Accept any gifts or direct payment in any form from the vessel operator, owner, or crew;

Participate in commercial fishing activities during the trip, such as dressing fish, shucking scallops, or standing wheel watch;

Hinder or slow fishing operations unless necessary to obtain critical discard or incidental take information;

Use personal recording devices, such as camcorders, cameras, cell phones, and diaries;

Use the vessel's communication equipment for personal purposes; nor

Discuss the observed trip with anyone other than program staff.

The Captain's legal responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

Ensure the vessel has a current U.S. Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination decal and other essential non-expired safety devices, provide the observer with a safety orientation, and maintain a wheel watch throughout the trip;

Cooperate with the observer in the performance of the observer's duties;

Provide the observer with living quarters, meals, and amenities comparable to a crew member;

Allow the observer access to areas of the vessel and gear necessary to conduct observer duties,

Allow the observer access to communication and navigation equipment as necessary to perform observer duties;

Provide true vessel locations by latitude and longitude upon request by the observer;

Provide the observer with VTR Serial Numbers and VMS Fishing Activity Codes if requested;

Notify the observer when commercial fishing operations are to begin and end;

Bring aboard marine mammals, sea turtles and sea birds that were killed during fishing operations if requested by the observer; and

Provide refrigerated storage space for observer-collected specimens within reason.

It is illegal for Captains and Crew to:

Assault, harass or sexually harass, intimidate or attempt to influence observers;

Interfere with or impede observer duties;

Ask observers to stand watch or help with fishing operations; and

Fish without an observer on board the vessel after the owner or agent of the owner has been directed by NMFS or the observer provider to carry an observer.

Observers should bring the following, along with other scientific gear:

C.P.R. Card, personal identification, and proof of insurance;

Survival suit and life jacket;

Appropriate clothing, such as boots, raingear, gloves, etc.;

Length frequency board for finfish and scallops;

Volumetric measuring cup for scallop meats;

Spring scales;

Scoopmaster for water temperature;

Scientific calipers and tape measure;

Buckets and/or baskets to sample; and

Work-issued cameras, logs, manuals, and field guides.

At the completion of a trip, Observers should provide the Captain with a:

Data Release Form to request a photocopy of the observer's trip logs;

Meal Reimbursement Form for multi-day trips (not provided for industry-funded trips);

Fishermen's Comment Card with pre-paid postage; and

Program brochure, upon request.